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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON INTERIOR
MINISTER ANDREAS CHRISTOU

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher; Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: On January 23, Ambassador Schlicher and Interior Minister Andreas Christou discussed the GOC's slow pace in implementing the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons, as well as the latest developments on property issues, the prospects for a reinvigorated Cyprus process and the outlook for parliamentary elections in May. Christou expressed hope that the resolution of the Cyprus Airways dispute would enable his Ministry to re-energize its efforts on TIP, and he committed to opening the promised victims shelter in Nicosia by the end of February. Christou complained to the Ambassador about Cyprus' designation as both a destination and a transit country. For the "vast majority" of foreign women employed in nightclubs and cabarets, Cyprus was their final destination. On property, Christou maintained that the Ministry did everything it could be help Turkish Cypriots living in the south gain access to their property or property of similar value. It was unfair and unreasonable, however, for Turkish Cypriots occupying Greek Cypriot homes in the north to also seek control over their abandoned properties in the south. Christou and the Ambassador agreed that the growing complexity of property issues underscored the urgent need for a Cyprus solution. Christou did not expect anything to happen before the Parliamentary elections. End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador Schlicher underscored U.S. interest in Trafficking in Persons as a high-priority issue and asked the Interior Minister for an update on efforts to implement the GOC National Action Plan on Trafficking. Christou maintained that implementation of the Action Plan was "not so bad," but neither, he added, was it as advanced as he personally would like it to be. The Permanent Secretary at the Interior Ministry, Lazaros Savvides, had been charged with coordinating the various ministries with responsibility for different aspects of implementation, but he had also been in charge of the Cyprus Airways negotiations. Now that the talks with Cyprus Airways were essentially concluded, Christou hoped Savvides would be able to devote more time to trafficking. In particular, Christou wanted the government to take action to limit the overall number of establishments -- cabarets, nightclubs, and bars -- employing foreign women under conditions that left them open to exploitation. Christou also promised the Ambassador that the planned victims shelter in Nicosia would be open by the end of February.

13. (C) Christou further acknowledged the need for new legislation in tackling the problem of trafficking. This was

a complex issue, but the Parliament was committed to taking up new draft laws regarding the obligations of cabarets and nightclubs towards their female employees. Because of the upcoming elections, however, it was unlikely action on the new legislation could be completed before October. The Ambassador asked about the status of the promised public awareness campaign. Christou noted that there were at least three ministries involved in this, but stressed that his own ministry had the lead and undertook to ensure that the GOC met its commitments with respect to raising awareness.

¶4. (C) Christou complained to the Ambassador that Cyprus had been identified in the U.S. TIP report as both a destination and a transit country. He did not believe that this was accurate. Cyprus was, he maintained, the final destination for the "vast majority" of women employed in nightclubs and cabarets. There were only a few isolated instances of women transiting Cyprus for employment elsewhere. Cyprus did not have "camps" such as those in Eastern Europe serving as way-stations to more lucrative employment in the West.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked Christou for an update on property issues, particularly with respect to his role as the "Guardian" of Turkish Cypriot properties in the south. Christou noted that the GOC had introduced a number of policy changes intended to improve the overall climate on property. First, the government had changed its prior policy of allowing refugees to construct new housing on un-used Turkish Cypriot land. This land could now only be used for agricultural purposes. Moreover, the GOC had computerized the land registry. Cyprus now had one of the most sophisticated registries and title search systems in Europe. The Interior Ministry provided considerable assistance, including financial assistance, to Turkish Cypriots looking to reclaim unoccupied properties. If a refugee family was living in the house, however, it was a more complicated situation. Where possible, the GOC tried to find compromise solutions to these conflicts by offering the use of a superior property to either the original owner or the occupant. The Ministry had, according to Christou, resolved at least sixty cases in this manner.

¶6. (C) Christou acknowledged the particular difficulties of the Arif Mustafa case in which a Turkish Cypriot resident in the south requested the return of his property and the refugee family currently inhabiting the house refused to move. Christou hoped a compromise could be found, but he stressed that the Mustafa case was quite different from one in which a Turkish Cypriot living in a Greek Cypriot property in the north sought access to his property in the south as well. This was simply unfair. Christou seemed sanguine about the recent ECHR suit challenging the ROC's Caretaker Law governing the disposition of Turkish Cypriot property. This was the Attorney General's problem, he noted, not the Interior Ministry's. Christou agreed with the Ambassador that the growing complexity of property issues only highlighted the need for a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador noted our continued interest in reinvigorating negotiations on a Cyprus settlement. We were looking to the parties for ideas on the way forward. The United States recognized that AKEL had an important role to play in this process and we hoped the party was prepared to exercise constructive leadership. Christou suggested that the pre-electoral period on the Greek Cypriot side was likely to be marked by nationalist rhetoric. He cautioned us not to judge the parties' positions on the Cyprus issue until after the elections. Since the referenda in April 2004, relations between the two communities have been characterized by profound mistrust. Christou lamented the "false picture" the Greek Cypriot public had of Turkish Cypriots as almost completely under the control of Ankara. Even on the vital level of personal contact between the two communities, momentum was flagging. Previously, entire villages would organize trips back and forth. This practice had all but ceased.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador asked for Christou's take on the May

Parliamentary elections. Would the Cyprus issue figure prominently in the campaigns, or would domestic issues dominate? Christou did not see a unifying theme emerging in the upcoming campaigns. In the end, he expected that both AKEL and DISY would lose a seat; DIKO would probably pick up one; EDEK would hold its position; the European Party would win two seats; the Greens would hold onto one; and both the United Democrats and Dinos Michalides' ADIK had a reasonable chance of crossing the threshold.

SCHLICHER